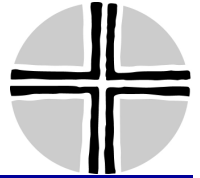


GOOD NEWS



"Witnessing the Transforming Power of the Holy Spirit in our Lives"

March—April 2008

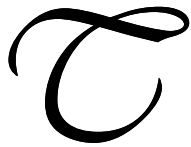
Lent — Easter

www.uuchristian.org

The Challenge of Jesus

The Rev. Ron Robinson

Executive Director of the Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship



These days this year of Lent and Easter I am pondering, both in my own life and in the life of our free

Christian movement, one question: Do we try to make the experience, the message, of Jesus too easy, too rational, too safe? Perhaps, speaking for myself, in describing our expansive and generous approach that is appreciative of all paths, we underestimate or sell short the way the story of Jesus, the power of Easter, can grab hold of you and change you, and above all sound a call in your life that will cause you to make big radical decisions, ones that others will deem crazy? I am thinking that every event and message of the UUCF should begin with a warning--hazardous to your status quo. Side effects may be that your time, your talents, your treasures, your default modes, your ways of seeing everything you do and everyone you are with, will all be re-oriented the further you walk with Jesus, the more often you break bread with strangers, the heavier your cross, the deeper your trust. Father John Dear, our

upcoming General Assembly 2008 lecturer in Fort Lauderdale, FL on Sunday June 29 at 1:30 p.m., illuminates this in his book "The Questions of Jesus" where he writes meditations based on all the questions Jesus asks as recorded in the various gospels. For Easter, he offers one from the story of Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. Lazarus falls ill, Jesus is summoned but doesn't rush to be with him, Lazarus dies, Jesus arrives, and Martha laments Jesus wasn't there to heal him, Jesus says Lazarus will rise, Martha says yes she knows he will in the general resurrection of the dead, and then in John 11:26 Jesus responds--"I am the Resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die; do you believe this?" Martha says she does believe, but as Jesus approaches Lazarus' tomb Martha tries to stop him, or fears what will happen, by proclaiming what a stench there will be.

Father Dear writes: "Why does Martha try to prevent

Jesus from raising Lazarus from the dead? Because she does not want Resurrection! She does not want the trouble, the mess, the scandal, and the political implications. She cannot accept that much hope, that much freedom, that much shocking faith. Despite her tears and grief, like the professional mourners hanging around the tomb, she has grown comfortable with death. She is at peace with the culture, the empire, the reality of death. Despite her words of faith, deep down Martha knows that death does get the last word. There is nothing that can be done in the face of death. Lazarus is dead. Our loved ones die. Famine, war, disease leave a trail of death--and that's life. Death is the living end. *Continued on p. 3*

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Good News

**"Witnessing to the Transforming
Power of the Holy Spirit in our
Lives"**

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The Season of Lent and Easter

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Infused with The Spirit

I once had a longing for God that hung like a yolk sac deep inside my chest, heavy, warm, and full of promise.

Where did it go?

I once knew the presence of God, thick and heavy, clinging like the suffocating heat of a sleepless July night.

Where did it go?

I once felt the call of God in the center of my being, like a compass wired into my core and programmed to take the necessary turns.

Where did it go?

I once had trouble staying focused on other things, as thoughts of God intruded. Now I cannot stay in prayer without wondering what I'll cook for dinner, or if I have time to make a phone call.

I remember weeping from the aching for God,

And weeping from the love of the divine embrace.

Where did it go?

Maybe you have times that are rich in spiritual life and other times that are thin, or dry, or down right barren. I do. From all I know about the spiritual life, this is its nature.

In such times participating in the liturgical seasons can be a life line. Sometimes only by participating in the rituals do you keep the channels open, remembering the pathways, recalling the centuries of saints and sinners who have walked them with us.

Sometimes, wonder of wonders, in those spiritually charged times, when we start walking those paths, and re-enter the story, God's presence once again becomes discernable, and our faith is transformed from theory to authentic practice.

For me, that happens most often at Easter, living through the passion of Jesus, following Holy Week as closely as I can, the happy/sad of Palm Sunday, the tenderness of Maundy Thursday, the deep grief of Good Friday, the emptiness of Holy Saturday, and the always surprising joy of Easter Sunday morning.

So please, whether you be infused with the Spirit, or bereft, enter into Holy Week with all the presence you can muster. Within its mystery are held the blessings of reconciliation, forgiveness, courage, hope and love. And don't we all need a little of each of these just now?

Easter blessings,
Anita

*the Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson, President UUCF
Interim Senior Minister, First parish in Cambridge*



The Challenge of Jesus, continued

Continued from p. 1

"Jesus asks his question because he knows Martha's love and faith, but he needs to hear her articulate it publicly. He also knows that she and everyone else believes ultimately not in the God of life but in the power of death. Martha tries to stop Jesus from raising Lazarus because she knows instinctively that if Jesus raises Lazarus, everything is up for grabs. If he raises her brother, there can be no doubt that their friend Jesus is the God of life, standing in their midst. She knows that reality is not as it appears. Martha knows that if Jesus brings life back to her brother, she will have to move from merely professing words of faith in Jesus to enacting deeds of faith by following the life-giving Jesus as he confronts death, undergoes death, and enters the new life of Resurrection."

We who are free followers of Jesus among Unitarian Universalists live on a line, one where it is tempting to say to other UUs on one side and to other Christians on the other side, "you don't have to worry about us; our faith is not a risk to yours; we are really, after all,

deep down, just like you, and you can be just like us, try our path for a while, take it for a test drive, see how comfortable it is". But this isn't the ride Jesus and



Freedom provides. It certainly isn't the meaning of Easter. It upends expectations of others. It questions us on our deepest level. It is smelly. It says no to all that we comfortably say yes to in our lives and communities that fosters separation from others and their plight, that blinds us to our own sickness, and that allows us to go on with the normalcy of fear masking as life and "the way things are."

Father Dear continues: "When the people take away the stone,

Jesus offers a prayer of gratitude and calls Lazarus to come out of the tomb. But Lazarus is still bound hand and foot by burial clothes, so Jesus commands them, "Unbind him and let him go free." We are never told whether or not they obey his command. Lazarus could still be there. If Lazarus represents the human race, oppressed by the culture of death, as some scholars suggest, then the God of life still waits for us to unbind humanity from the trappings of death and set it free."

This Easter let that be our mission and our calling too. And in our lives, and in our churches, and in our relationships, and in our small groups, and in our events, our messages, our ministries, let there be no misunderstanding how unsafe, uneasy, and unwise, as common measures go, this all is. And yet, as Easter equally reminds us, when we enter life with Jesus, regardless of how often we have failed and betrayed him and his calling to us, all will be well with our souls.

Amen.

Next UUCF Revival:

Thur. - Sun., Mar. 26-29, 2009, All Souls, Tulsa, Oklahoma. More details and announcements coming soon. Also check out www.uuchristian.org/revival and www.allsoulschurch.org.

2008 General Assembly Annual Dinner, Meeting, Program will be held Saturday, June 28, at the Fort Lauderdale UU Church where UUCF Board Member Rev. Gail Tapscott is minister. It will begin with a reception and refreshments at 5:30 p.m. followed by catered dinner (\$20 per person) and program from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

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Give it up for Lent!

Rev. Kathleen Rolenz

I love Lent. I look forward to it like some kids look forward to Christmas. Maybe it's because I didn't "have" to do anything for Lent as a child. Many of my friends and colleagues who were raised Catholic and felt forced into a discipline they didn't understand, can't fathom why I appreciate this time of year more than any other.

Every year I've undertaken a Lenten discipline. When I first started out, I tried letting go of all the usual things--my addiction to chocolate, for example, or, more recently, Altoids. Giving up a tangible, physical addiction seems like an obvious thing to do, not because the addiction itself is so bad (I mean how much harm can come to you from overeating Altoids, really?) but because "giving something up" for Lent reminds us of the constant cravings that plague our every moment. When we begin to flush out our inexhaustible desires, we begin to create more room for God and for that "still small voice" which we struggle to hear.

Having successfully given up smoking, alcohol and sugar during various Lenten seasons, I started thinking about the other, more intangible addictions that, nevertheless, take up a lot of room in my mind and heart. One year I gave up gossiping for Lent. Wow, was that every difficult. I became aware of the urge to chat about others--to make judgments and comments, regardless of how subtle--was ever present. I read about the Jewish injunction about "Loshon Hora" or to avoid malicious talk. I thought about how what we know about Jesus was that he was circumspect in his speech and in his judgments about



others.

Another year I gave up self-criticism. I thought giving up gossip was bad! I never realized how much criticism I heaped upon myself for even the slightest infraction or deviance from my own high standards. I was relentless! I discovered that my softening my heart to my own imperfections, I could more easily and gracefully do the same for others. I began to understand that I am simply a child of God--no more, no less; beloved along with all of God's creations and that I should treat myself with the same dignity and respect that God treats me. When Easter morning came, I felt like a new creation--that I had walked through Lazarus tomb and had emerged blinking, into the radiance of God's love.

This year, my Lenten disciplines are legion. I began a weekly fast on Ash Wednesday to remind myself of both the hunger that is experienced in the world, and to discern what I am truly hungry for. In addition to cutting out my daily dose of peppermints, I've made a pact with myself to stop buying things mindlessly or randomly--a kind of shopping therapy that is like any other addiction. It brings pleasure in the moment, and guilt and regret later, when

you realize that all those little things bought don't fill the emptiness that whispered "you'll feel better if you have this." And finally, the last Lent discipline I hope to maintain is to avoid complaining at all costs.

It started when a church member gave me the book "A Complaint Free World," written by a Unity minister. I read it, and immediately started complaining about it! I realized that I *like* complaining. It makes me feel wise, superior and ever so curmudgeonly. When I can find fault with others or institutions--the UUA, the GA Planning Committee--whatever, I feel ever so smug and smart. As I read this book, lightweight though it is, I realized how much complaining I do and the world does. Like an addiction--there is an immediate rush of superiority followed by, for me, a crash of regret. I can't help but think of how Jesus wanted us to be like little children--open, fresh, loving, all-embracing. I can't help but acknowledge that as I get older, it gets harder and harder to love--to accept--to not complain.

So, Lent gives me the opportunity to undertake a discipline. I know I won't make it through the 40 days of Lent perfectly. I know I'll find myself complaining, or tempted to shop or buy Altoids or I might forget that Wednesday is my fast day. But I hope to simply stop, recognize it, and begin again--and again--and again, of necessary, to keep faithful to the kind of person I want to become, in Christ.

May you find hope, grace and strength for this Lenten season, wherever it takes you.

The UU Christian in the Lenten Season

Gilbert Guerrero

Is it just me or does being a UU Christian sometimes feel a little preposterous? What passes for UU conventional wisdom sometimes sends the message that I oughta be a “real” UU and embrace a “big tent” sort of Neopolitan-flavored spirituality, and this “Jesus-fetish” seems just a liiiiittle suspect.

“You’re not one of ‘those’ are you?”

My mainline Christian brothers, on the other hand say “what are you doing hanging around with those flakey UUs?”

What can I say – we get no respect coming or going!

Pilgrimages figure highly in the scripture passages I’m going to share. Some scholars believe the group of Psalms from 120 – 134 are Pilgrim songs (their titles are sometimes translated as “Songs of Ascent”,) that might be sung on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem or on the steps up to the Temple.

When Jewish pilgrims made the trek to the temple in Jerusalem, bandits knew that they were likely to be easy pickings. These Songs of Ascent offer reflections about the experience of being on that path. Sanctuaries from the dangers of the trip were built on the hills surrounding Jerusalem, to help these pilgrims make the trip safely. In Psalm 121, we hear the pilgrim affirming the faith in the Lord to protect that pilgrim passage to the Temple. “My help comes from the Lord.”

Faith for the trip figures highly in Genesis 12:1-4. God says to Abraham: **PACK IT UP.** Leave everything. Country. Kindred. Father’s House. *Pilgrimage time for you, my son – I will show you a new land and bless and raise you up as a great nation.* Now that is what you call faith & *pioneering spirit!* And later the passage says that Abram was 75 -- and he went! Don’t know where I’m headed, but

it must be fine because it’s the path the Lord has put me on. (Being a human, presumably Abraham also thought it was a little cool that God told him that his name would be so great it would be used in blessings. That *would be cool* wouldn’t it? “*In the name of Gil, and all things faithful and righteous: I bless you*”?)

In Romans 4:1-5/13-17, Paul talks about Abraham. Paul is arguing about how Abraham and the People received their justification and by extension how we the readers get “in” with God. Paul takes issue with the notion that one “got good” with God by following the law, as Abraham had obediently followed God. Paul is broadening the message by saying that *faith*, not just legal obedience, was the key to Abraham’s blessing and those who follow in that faith share in that grace.

On February 6th, we started our own Lenten pilgrimage for this year. Lent to me is a time to reflect on our path as UU Christians and what message we take from Christ. This season certainly focuses our reflection on Jesus path to Jerusalem, the last days of His ministry, His capture and execution at the hands of the Roman Empire, and His resurrection.

Finally, John 3:1-17, we have Jesus meeting in the dark of night with Nicodemus the Pharisee, the representative of the Jewish lawyerly ruling class. I get the sense of Nicodemus being curious and a little furtive, has heard some powerful things, but doesn’t want to be caught talking to this little peasant Rabbi. Nicodemus comes across as having the density of “too much book learnin’” He can’t understand the emotional and spiritual lessons that Jesus is offering. “Born again? *You mean climb back into the womb?*” But Jesus is calling him to the new life that comes from the cleansing baptismal waters. John

also reminds us there that we are being lead down the path to Jesus crucifixion, and the ultimate manifestation of God’s Love by offering the sacrifice of His Son.

I can only imagine the turmoil that the disciples must have gone through in their lives. Our beloved Rabbi and Teacher, BOOM – dead. Now where do we go? It takes a *big dog* faith to see your leader snatched and executed and to still have faith in the path you’ve been put on. It certainly puts my little UU Christian twinges and neuroses in perspective.

What is this Lenten pilgrimage that we are on? As part of a small Lenten spiritual practice, some within the our local UUCF group are sharing some UU Lenten meditations this year, and a terrific one came by the other day about “*Reinforcement through Fellowship.*” Henry and Regina Wieman offer the following

“The sense of belonging to a noble, larger whole marks religious behavior. This introduces warmth, and strength, courage and pattern to the responding of the devotee. Usually this sense of belonging is mediated through a group sharing the same devotion.”

Wieman’s student Donald Harrington adds:

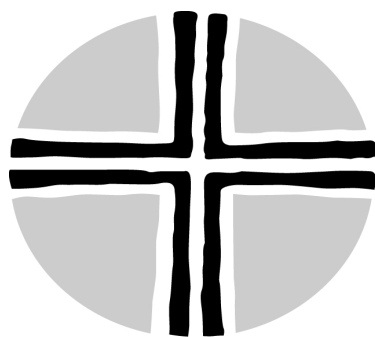
“What we all want more than anything else in the world is for our lives to have some genuine significance – to be part of something greater than ourselves...For the truly religious person that something is to be part of the evolving ‘*City of God,*’ the growth of mutual support, enhancement and meaning among all humans and all parts of the living universe.”

Continued on p. 6...

Continued from p.5 ...This season has been for me an opportunity to reflect on being in Fellowship, on Jesus, and on my faith. Faith in being a UU Christian. Faith in Jesus' message. I *do* believe in the possibilities of the "big tent" of Unitarian Universalism, but "the wind blows where it chooses" and I'm native born and fluent in Christianity.

I *do* find wisdom in other religious traditions, but I can focus my attention most effectively in Christ's teachings. This kind of focus and long-time training internalizes that faith, so that it flows naturally in the everyday transactions of life. And let's face it: Jesus is HARD. Compassion and love for all – no exceptions. (The tent doesn't get any bigger than that!) But when we're harried, and late, and in our own little bubbles, it can be hard to see the spark of divinity in a dirty smelly unkempt face at a stoplight, or in the jerk that cut us off on the freeway, or the backstabber at the office. That takes PRACTICE. And a lot of it!

Even for my moments of despair in how tenuous being a UU Chris-



tian sometimes feels, I feel a tremendous grace in having found Jesus in a way that he wasn't available to me before. In a way that "makes sense." And that grace comes from Unitarian Universalism. It sometimes *feels* like being born "anew" (as some scholars translate it) because this world looks different; this Jesus certainly looks very different from the one I knew as a child. Yet, he's much more complex, compelling, and much more radical than I every understood or imagined.

What is this Lenten pilgrimage we're on? This pilgrimage is something we get a chance to practice every year, if we allow it into our life. Coming to Church is a spiritual practice. Smiling at a stranger is a spiritual practice. Being in fellowship is a spiritual practice. When we practice fellowship this season, we share our

Christian path and share our faith in walking together. Every one of us must wrestle with our understanding of Jesus and the message of his Life and Death, perhaps again and again. Together in the Body of Christ, we walk this pilgrimage in the only way we know how: a step at a time, seeking, questioning, reasoning, and yet still faithfully choosing to walk the path with Christ.

Perhaps the best message to be found in today's scripture is faith in this path, faith in the wealth of this particular journey. Faith in going somewhere, wherever it may be: ask Abraham!

I said earlier we get no respect coming or going, but let us take comfort in the closing of Psalm 121: "The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore."

May it be so.

Gilbert Guerrero is the Congregational Administrator, and a member of the Christian Chalice Circle, at Horizon UU Church in Carrollton, TX. He also helped start the monthly UU Christian worship service at Horizon..

Revival 2007 DVDs Available!

Below is the order form for the DVDs made during Revival 2007 in Cleveland at West Shore UU Church with three lectures by renowned biblical scholar and speaker John Dominic Crossan on The Apostle Paul: 1.) The world of Paul and Roman Imperial Theology, 2.) The mission of Paul, and 3.) the message of Paul, in light of new understandings. Along with a DVD of Revival highlights--welcome, worship service, workshops and small group highlights, and a DVD of the Taize, Gregorian Chanting Morning Service. These DVDs will be excellent for adult education, for UUCF small groups, for individual study and meditation, and for getting a small glimpse or reminder of Revival. All sales support Revival.

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	_____	copies of Taize Gregorian Chant	@ \$18.00	\$ _____

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Campus Ministry Report

Submitted by the Rev. Dee Graham

We like to hear reports from around the country about what UU Christian groups, and UU Christians are doing as part of their faith. This month we include a report from the Rev. Dee Graham who is a campus minister in Florida. We welcome submissions from all of our readers!

This month rushed by so fast it hardly seemed like a break, especially when the last week at USF's non-traditionally aged student support group produced some individuals with family crises. Mostly these could be handled within the group support and with some pastoral conversations, but in one case the family needed more help than our support network was able to provide.

The student who presented the crisis is a bilingual graduate student at USF. Her sister is an undergraduate student at USF. The parents are Roman Catholic, but not active in a local parish since they work a local flea market on weekends when the Spanish language services are offered. When her

father had been laid off from Welcraft, she became the family's primary financial support. Due to what sounds like unethical business practices combined with language difficulties, the parents spent money that was earmarked for housing and utilities on auto repair. Usually the faith community has resources for these predicaments, so I reached out to Catholic (the family's denomination), Protestant (one daughter's church), and standard community resources (Salvation Army, etc.) to connect them to assistance. Unfortunately, for various reasons, none of these worked out and my attempt to help failed. This was certainly a learning situation as far as our limitations in campus ministry and our need to have some processes in place for when such situations occur.

A great opportunity occurred during the New Year when a new online media owner invited me to accompany one of the New College students involved in campus ministry (the daughter of a UCC minister) and two other Tampa Bay area community college

students to the Iowa Caucus. We attended an on-campus UCC church in Indianola, Iowa, and I stayed with the clergy family there while the students had the unusual opportunity to meet several of the candidates and observe the caucus process.

This past week classes began on all campuses, although at New College this is intersession. With the help of volunteers, the Rev. Don Thompson (UMC retired) and Leo Pastore (Roman Catholic), we staffed the campus ministry table for USF and greeted incoming students for the week of welcome there. This semester the university has grown to 4,000 students on the Sarasota Campus.

I was also pleased to present the Power Point presentation that you will be receiving today at Saint Andrews United Church of Christ with our Campus Minister Emeritus, the Rev. William Jacobs, this past Sunday. The congregation was welcoming at the Sunday service and took up a collection in support of this ministry.

For those with internet access the UUCF has posted recent sermons by various ministers on Lent and Easter. You can go to these links by going to

www.uuchristian.org/page/3/.

You can also go to our links section to get access to a variety of ecumenical resources. Also check out our UUCF liturgical year blog at

www.thechristianyear.blogspot.com

where you can add your own finds and inspirations for others. If you know of good sermons or messages that others can read online, or listen to, please send their links to RevRonRobinson@aol.com.

UU Christian Journal Features Prize Winning Essays and More. The next volume of the UU Christian Journal, vol. 61,

will feature the following essays: Rev. Harry Hoehler, minister emeritus of First Parish in Weston, Mass., on "Christian Zionism: The Bible and God"; Rev. Mark Belletini, minister of First UU Church of Columbus, OH, on "From Resentment to Justice: The Son of Mary as a Hebrew Prophet Faithful to the Torah"; Rev. Lisa Friedman, minister of UU Fellowship of Mankato, MN, "The Jesus Quandry: Unitarian Universalism from a Jewish Perspective" (The essays by Revs. Belletini and Friedman were part of a special study on Jesus by the Ohio River Minister's Study Group; also the 2007 Clayton R. Bowen Essay Prize in biblical scholarship "Jonah's Dilemma: Who Are My

Brothers and Sisters?" and the 2007 Frederic Henry Hedge Prize in church history "Brook Farm: The Rise, Fall, and Legacy of a "City of God"', both won this year by Aaron McEmrys, a recent graduate of Meadville Lombard Theological School who has now been ordained and is serving churches in Colorado. Also included will be the 2006 Bowen Prize in biblical scholarship "Insights Regarding Pauline Christology: Through an Exegesis of Philippians 2:6-11". Journal copies can be ordered for \$20 per copy by sending a check payable to the UUCF, marked Journal vol. 61, to P.O. Box 6702 Turley, OK 74156. See the www.uuchristian.org website for links to special deals and back issues of the Journal. These are special opportunities that make good gifts for graduates and ordination gifts as well.

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Are You Already a Member of the UUCF? Great!

Now is the time to renew your membership. Each and every year, the leadership team of the UUCF reviews the membership rolls and hopes that you will decide that the UUCF is important enough in your life to renew your membership. **Are you not yet a member? Join today!**

Why is it important to sustain the UUCF through your membership?

The UUCF is a self-supporting and self-sustaining institution. The first and most important reason to stay connected to the UUCF is because we represent a liberal religious Christian presence in the Unitarian Universalist Association. We believe that Unitarian Universalism is broadened and deepened by our active presence and our faithful witness. We represent one of the few organizations in the UUA that can claim an authentic theological position, and the only one that can claim a historical tradition that dates back to the beginning of our movement. We bring to one another spiritual support, meaningful worship, intellectual engagement, and serve as a powerful witness for liberal Christianity within our tradition as Unitarian Universalists.

With the removal of affiliate status in the UUA, our expenses will be higher and our ability to have a presence at General Assembly, more expensive. We need your support. Please make a monthly pledge to the UUCF today.—*Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, First Vice President*